gulf studies

e Gulf Committee London WC1
Endsleigh Street England

April 1976 No.1

ARMED STRUGGLE IN ARABIA

Abdul Fattah Ismail

HOW WE LIBERATED ADEN

Fred Halliday

COUNTER-INSURGENCY IN OMAN

ISSN 0308-0145

G U L F S T U D I E S

NUMBER I. APRIL 1976

ARMED STRUGGLE IN ARABIA

Introduction . . . . . p 1

Map . . . . . p 2

Abdul Fatah Ismail: *How we liberated Aden* . . . . . p 3

Said Messaoud: *Our struggle continues* . . . . . p 11

Fred Halliday: *Counter-insurgency in Oman* . . . . . p 13

EDITED AND PUBLISHED BY: THE GULF COMMITTEE, LONDON.

© The Gulf Committee, London

Gulf Studies is published twice yearly by the Gulf Committee. All correspondence and articles should be addressed to the Gulf Committee. Signed articles express the views of their authors, and do not necessarily represent the positions of the Committee.

THE GULF COMMITTEE thanks GLORIA GEORGE for designing the cover of the magazine.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

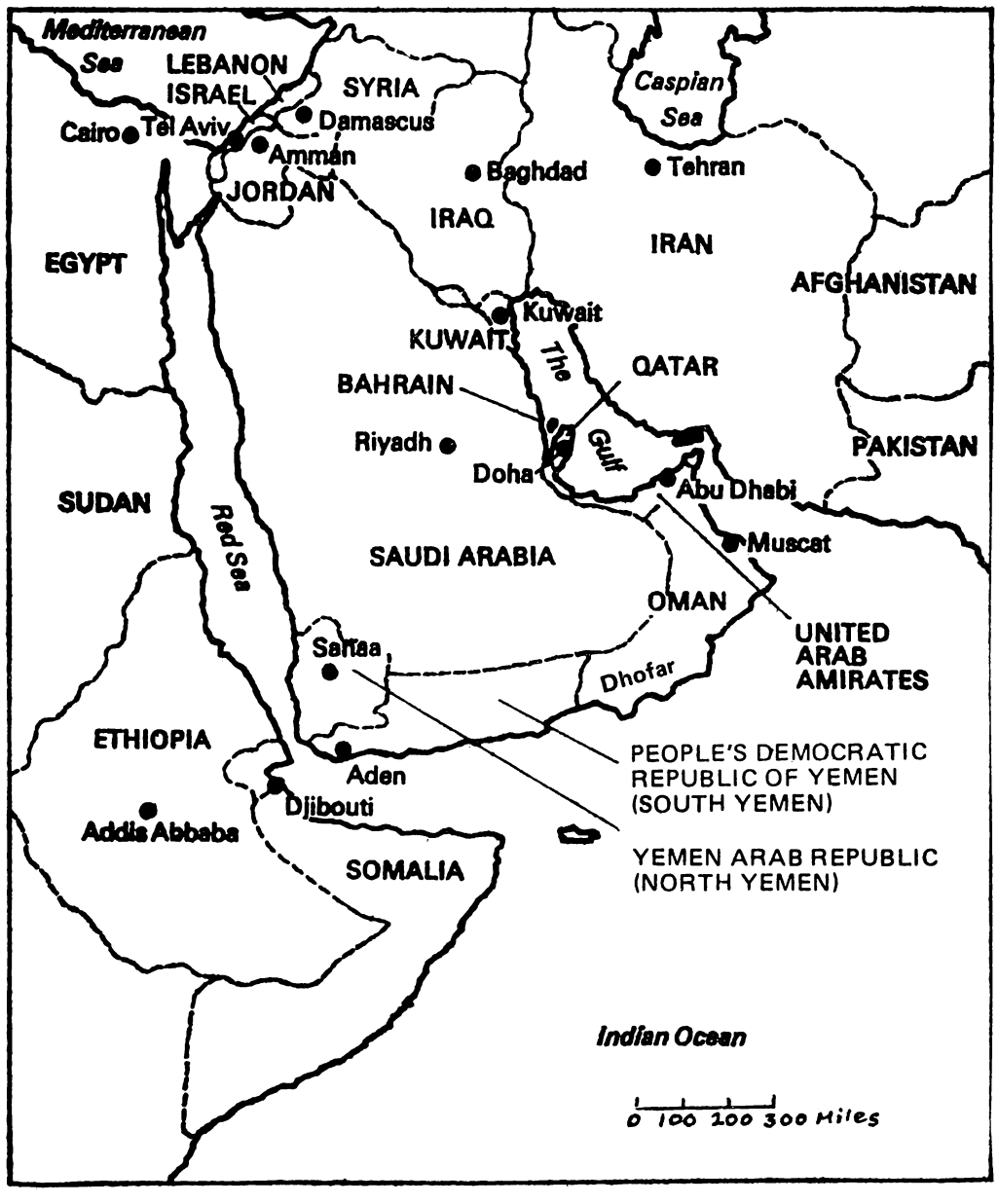
The contents of this first issue of Gulf Studies covers a twelve-year period of the revolutionary movement in South Arabia, from the start of armed struggle against British rule in South Yemen in 1963, to the campaign against the liberated areas of Dhofar by the anglo-Iranian forces of intervention at the end of 1975. The first article, on the armed struggle in South Yemen and specifically in its capital Aden, is taken from an interview given in July 1974 to the Beirut weekly al-Hurriah by Abdul Fatah Ismail, one of the leaders of the underground movement in South Yemen. Abdul Fatah Ismail was originally from North Yemen and a school-teacher by profession. Now, in his late thirties he is Secretary-General of the ruling National Liberation Front and is regarded as the organisation's leading theoretician. His account of the movement's development is the first such first-hand account to appear outside the Arab world and provides a unique insight into the means whereby a revolutionary movement triumphed in South Yemen.

The port of Aden, situated on the south-west corner of the Arabian peninsula and at the mouth of the Red Sea, was between 1839 and 1967 one of the main links in Britain's world-wide chain of imperial communications. To-day it is the capital of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, the most militantly anti-imperialist and socially revolutionary state in the Arab world. This dramatic reversal of roles is the result of the nationalist struggle which began amidst the Aden trades union movement in the 1950s and which developed in 1963 into a guerrilla war against the British and their local allies, the Aden merchants and the Sultans and Amirs of the South Yemeni hinterland.

The organisation which began the guerrilla campaign was the National Liberation Front, a coalition of groups which in the process of the guerrilla struggle clashed with its Egyptian backers, rejected its initial nationalist ideology and declared itself in favour of "marxism-leninism". The bases of the NLF were in the neighbouring state of North Yemen where a Republic had been proclaimed in September 1962 and where Egyptian forces were supporting the Republicans against the supporters of the previous regime, the Royalists who received the backing of Saudi Arabia. But by 1966 the Egyptians were giving their support to a rival group, FLOSY, and it was only after outbreaks of fighting between the two organisations in 1967 that the NLF was able to establish its control of the whole nationalist movement. The British, who had hoped to hand over power to a pro-western coalition of traditional rulers, were at the last minute forced to recognise the NLF.

The Dhofar province of Oman, which borders South Yemen, is the scene of another armed struggle against British imperialism, which broke out in 1965 and which at one time seemed to be extending the revolutionary current that had begun in North Yemen to the oil-producing areas of the Gulf. However, after 1970, an unprecedented coalition of external forces intervened in Oman to crush the guerrilla movement and to stem the revolutionary tide at the South Yemeni border. By late 1975, it was clear that the wave of armed struggle which had begun with the North Yemeni coup of September 1962 had, temporarily, been halted whilst the Sultan's regime was maintained in power by an army of occupation.

In a short interview, Said Messaoud, head of the Aden office of the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman, and a prisoner in Muscat's Kut al-Jalali prison from 1965 to 1970, gives PFLO's analysis of the forces confronting his organisation, while in a general overview of the Dhofar war Fred Halliday, author of Arabia without Sultans, analyses the factors that led to the outcome of the conflict and relates the experience of Dhofar to the general development of imperialist, and specifically British, counter-insurgency policy.


Mediterranean Sea
LEBANON
ISRAEL
SYRIA
Damascus
Cairo
Tel Aviv
Amman
JORDAN
Baghdad
Tehran
Caspian Sea
IRAQ
IRAN
EGYPT
AFGHANISTAN
Kuwait
KUWAIT
The Gulf
QATAR
BAHRAIN
Riyadh
Doha
Abu Dhabi
PAKISTAN
SUDAN
Red Sea
SAUDI ARABIA
Muscat
OMAN
UNITED ARAB AMIRATES
Sanaa
Dhofar
ETHIOPIA
Aden
Djibouti
Addis Abbaba
SOMALIA
PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF YEMEN (SOUTH YEMEN)
YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC (NORTH YEMEN)
Indian Ocean
0 100 200 300 Miles

HOW WE LIBERATED ADEN

ABDUL FATAH ISMAIL

Q. What were the origins of the guerrilla movement against British rule that began in South Yemen in 1963? What was the response of the population and what was the political character of the organisation which began the struggle, the National Liberation Front (NLF)?

A. During the 1950s and into the early 1960s, there had been a considerable amount of opposition to British rule and to Britain's allies, the Sultans, but this had tended to take the form of peaceful political struggle. It was only at the beginning of the 1960s that the idea of launching an armed struggle took hold within some of the underground organisations- they realised that peaceful means alone would not be able to liberate our country from British rule.[1]

Prominent among these latter groups was the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN)[2], which at the end of the 1950s had produced a pamphlet entitled *Our Attitude to the Fake Federation*[3]. In this the MAN had argued that armed struggle was the only way to oust the British. One of the factors contributing to this realisation was the enthusiasm aroused in South Yemen by the struggles then being waged in Cuba and in Algeria. But the MAN realised that it could not start an armed struggle in the South until the overthrow of the clerical Imamist regime in the North, since the weakest link in the whole Yemen lay in the North, not in the South. However, on 26 September 1962 the Imamist regime was overthrown and the Yemeni Arab Republic was proclaimed in the North[4]; this then created the conditions in which armed struggle could begin in the South.

The revolution in the North made it possible to launch armed struggle in the South. First of all, the Republic was being attacked not only by its Royalist enemies who were operating from Saudi Arabia but also by forces operating from the British-occupied South. The British had set up centres for recruiting local mercenaries in the South and these were being sent on sabotage missions against the Republic. Secondly, the Republic had created an area that could serve as a secure base in the struggle against the British, and the population in the South rallied to the defense of the new regime in the North, which to them symbolised the awakening of the whole Yemeni people. Many thousands of people in the Southern countryside and towns volunteered to fight in the ranks of the National Guard, a popular force which was defending the YAR against Royalist attacks.

The nationalist movement in the South had therefore the duty to defend the North against the Royalists and the British, and had the opportunity to benefit from the situation in order to liberate the South. Our first aim was to set up a National Front, and the MAN held discussions with the Ba'ath Party[5] and the People's Socialist Party with the aim of arriving at a common position on armed struggle. But these organisations still believed in peaceful struggle, while we thought it essential to launch the armed struggle. In May 1963, therefore, discussions were held in Sanaa[6] between the MAN and some other clandestine political organisations[7] and as a result the National Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen was founded. Already one of the components of the NLF, the Formation of Tribes, was fighting British forces in the Radfan mountains[8], and we realised the need for the whole Front to go onto the offensive.

At that time Egyptian forces had come to North Yemen to defend the YAR and there were close relations between the MAN and Egyptian President Nasser. One of the factors that contributed to this was the occurrence of clashes on the borders of North and South Yemen between Egyptian and British forces, and as a result of the good relations between Egypt and the MAN Nasser agreed to supply us with arms via the Egyptian forces in the North. Training was organised in NLF camps in the North and we began to store arms secretly in the South, while small groups of guerrillas were set up. We were then in a position to launch our armed struggle which began in Radfan on 14 October 1963.

We linked this military preparation to a political one, spreading our ideas through radios broadcasting from North Yemen and Egypt, and through the distribution of our publication, Liberation in the South. The population of the South responded enthusiastically, whereas the British and their allies, the Sultans, underestimated us and thought that the revolution would be quickly wiped out by the British army and the Royal Air Force. As for the other nationalist groups, their attitude varied, and reflected prevailing disagreements in the Arab world as a whole. The People's Socialist Party tried to belittle our struggle and its leader Abdullah al-Asnaj, referred to us as "Arab Dervishes", while the Salafi Youth Organisation gave us moral support[9]. The Ba'th, affected by the conflict then existing between Nasserists and the MAN on one side and itself on the other, kept away from us.[10]

The political character of the Front was defined like that of any other national liberation movement by its struggle against colonialism. We considered that the main forces of the movement were the workers, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie and those other sections of society opposed to colonialism, and the Front was the organisation which embodied their aspirations. The Front was therefore based on the struggle against the very existence of colonialism and of the Sultans and against all those opposed to national liberation. As the movement developed, it also underwent an ideological change, and it began to shift from the nationalist and chauvinist outlook that had been propagated by the MAN towards scientific socialist thought and the adoption of a concept of the party deriving from it. This was evident from the National Charter adopted at the First Congress of the Front in June 1965. The Charter constituted the theoretical basis of the Front, and although it had a petty bourgeois character it represented an advance in the organisation's ideology. For example, it declared that the Front's theory was based on scientific socialism, although this was still rather vague and socialist ideas had not spread among the leaders or rank and file members of the organisation. There were, however, some leaders who had educated themselves and were aware of the experiences of socialist movements elsewhere. For us, this adherence to socialism was a great step forward and a political gain for the revolution: we realised that there is no such thing as a specifically Arab or Islamic or African socialism, only scientific socialism, based on an analysis of each specific society[11].

Q. How did the NLF organise the masses in South Yemen and attract the support of political clubs and of trades unions?

A. In national liberation struggles it is essential to use different forms of struggle, and although we regarded armed struggle as the most effective form and the one most likely to force colonialism to allow the people to be free, we knew that it was the pre-existing political struggle that formed the basis on which armed struggle had developed. In the early period of the guerrilla movement, we concentrated on consolidating its support in Aden and in the surrounding rural areas, but we also employed other forms of struggle: we organised popular demonstrations, and workers' strikes, and raised the question of South Yemen at the United Nations, the Arab League and elsewhere. In particular we concentrated on building support for the

Front in the working class movement. The 6 trades unions which rallied to our cause[12] formed the basis of the revolutionary current within the workers' movement and consolidated our support within the ranks of the Yemeni working class. In the same way we gained support within the student, women and sports organisations. We were able to remove the opportunist leaders and new ones supporting the revolution took over. These organisations played an important part in the struggle: for example, women used to distribute pamphlets, relay correspondence and internal directives, and, in the country, they transported arms and provided guerrillas with food. The students carried out numerous strikes and resisted the educational policy of the colonialists.

We were at the same time able to develop our methods of operation. At the start we operated quite secretly, basing ourselves on a "hit and run" approach; our guerrillas used to wear masks to conceal their faces. We then strengthened our organisations and executed most of the members of the intelligence services, whether British or Yemeni, and this enabled us to operate more openly. We were therefore able to carry out operations that involved deploying a large number of guerrillas, taking up positions in more than one place at a time. Street battles in Aden against British[13] tanks and infantry and the occupation of Crater for sixteen days were evidence of the advanced stage our struggle had reached. We were later able to make the transition to a further, decisive, stage of the national liberation struggle when the armed struggle became a war of popular liberation ; then, the masses were armed and were able to overthrow the Sultans and sheikhs[14] one after another in the weeks following the Crater occupation.

Q. In the last two years of the liberation struggle there was constant rivalry between yourselves, in the National Front, and the former advocates of the peaceful line, now organised in FLOSY - the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen. On 13 January 1966 FLOSY claimed that all nationalist forces had merged under its leadership, but the NLF later broke away and denied the validity of the merger. What was happening in this situation?

A. Until the end of 1965 the NLF was the only group waging an armed struggle, and the British had almost come to realise that we were the only organised nationalist group. Then those who had originally rejected armed struggle suddenly proclaimed their belief in it. The People's Socialist Party, the South Arabian League[15] and some Sultans who had withdrawn from discussions with the British all united and in January 1966 FLOSY was created. This hindered the development of our struggle; from January to October 1966 the number of guerrilla actions decreased because the Egyptian intelligence people in North Yemen limited the supply of arms to the NLF. All heavy weaponry was withheld from us and in addition, FLOSY which had no fighting organisation of its own, was claiming responsibility for the actions carried out by the NLF. FLOSY controlled the information media in North Yemen and in Cairo while we now had no communications media at all, except for leaflets reporting on our guerrilla actions and on our political positions. Here too FLOSY used to issue leaflets claiming responsibility for actions it had never carried out, and all this inevitably created confusion among the masses.

The armed struggle only regained its former level in November 1966, when the NLF announced that it had broken with FLOSY completely after our Third Congress. After we withdrew, we carried out some robberies against banks and foreign companies and imposed a high tax on the salaries of NLF members: this gave us the money to buy arms and to continue military operations in the town and the countryside. After some rural districts fell under our control, we were also able to acquire the stores of weapons that had belonged to the Sultans. The movement thereby regained its former impetus.

Following our withdrawal we tried to maintain relations with FLOSY and to direct our joint efforts against the common enemy. However the leadership of FLOSY were encouraging their members to commit provocations against the NLF, although there existed better relations with some members of the FLOSY rank and file. In June 1967, during the occupation of Crater, members of FLOSY assassinated Abdulnabi Madram, one of the NLF's leading military cadres, and this led to the first outbreak of fighting between NLF and FLOSY members in July, when tens of militants and innocent people were killed. Although a ceasefire was arranged, and although discussions were going on in Cairo involving the Arab League in an attempt to re-create some kind of national unity, the spirit of revenge remained dominant in FLOSY and assassination attempts continued against NLF civilian and military leaders. Early in in September a group of FLOSY people threw a handgrenade at some of the military leaders of the NLF, outside their headquarters in the Hashimi district of Sheikh Othman; shooting began and several people were killed and wounded. A second round of fighting then began and it spread to the whole of the Aden area and the province of Lahej nearby; there was no fighting elsewhere as FLOSY had no support there. In the end, the NLF triumphed after our forces had come in from other parts of the country to fight with us.

The British then tried to play their last card, the South Arabian Army[16]. Many parts of the country had already fallen into the hands of the NLF, and the whole Sultanic regime was about to collapse. Britain therefore announced that it was willing to hand over to the Army; by doing so it hoped to provoke a clash between the Army and ourselves. However, the NLF had built an organisation within the ranks of the soldiers and officers, and they were thereby able to counter the army command. The NLF issued a statement warning the Army against any acceptance of the British plan and as a result the Army rejected the offer. When they saw how strong the NLF was, the Army leadership had no option but to side with the NLF although the British still hoped that the Army would, in the end, be able to undermine South Yemeni independence. And the events of 1968[17] appeared to confirm this expectation.

Q. Very little is known about the urban guerrilla struggle waged by the NLF in Aden. Can you summarise this experience for us, and explain how you were able to occupy Crater, in the heart of Aden, in June 1967?

A. We began with absolutely nothing. The MAN was only a political organisation; it had no knowledge of how to use weapons, although it did know about the experiences of Cuba, Algeria, China and the guerrilla war in Russia after the October Revolution. Before the Radfan uprising, several members of our group had studied problems of armed struggle, and I remember that we used to organise weekly trips to the countryside so that some of our members could learn how to use firearms. They formed the first guerrilla units in Aden.

After the struggle began in Radfan, we began thinking about extending armed struggle to Aden, especially since the struggle in the countryside did not absorb all our resources, given the favourable geographical conditions existing in the mountainous areas of Dhala, Mukairas, Yafai and the like. We reckoned that if guerrilla activity could be developed in Aden itself, this would alter the balance of forces in favour of the revolution; the British were not too concerned about the struggle in the countryside, and were willing to endure it for years, but they did not want it to spread to Aden itself. They were concerned to keep Aden, a large port, free of trouble; they had been disturbed by the traditional, trades unions, struggles of the earlier phase, and would be even more so by the sound of bullets and ''terrorist' explosions. Another important aspect of the situation was that the inhabitants of Aden had never heard

an explosion in their lives. For our part, the NLF guerrillas had no experience of carrying out operations directly against enemy targets, and at the beginning things were very difficult for them especially since they believed that the British intelligence services had them under observation. This sense of exposure was partly due to the geographical nature of Aden itself; it is like a small peninsula or bottleneck which can be controlled easily by a small force and sealed off within a matter of minutes. On top of this was the fact that our guerrilla forces had not been trained in or studied urban struggle although they were well acquainted with the town itself, its streets, its lanes and the hills behind.[18]

We nevertheless proceeded to lay our preparations and in spite of the military perimeter built by the British around Aden, with the checkpoints and miles upon miles of barbed wire, we were able to transport arms into the city. Sometimes we used cars, and sometimes we brought weapons in with the camels which were taking fodder and vegetables to Aden market from the farms outside. In Aden itself we manufactured plastic bombs from chemicals we had acquired. We then began military action in Aden itself in 1964, only a few months after the Radfan struggle began, and we started by throwing hand grenades into the homes and clubs of British officers and by firing bazookas at them. In these operations, our guerrillas learnt how weak the British military apparatus in Aden was, and how it was not possible for the enemy to cordon the area off after the first explosion. On one occasion a small group of guerrillas were ordered to open fire on the Royal Air Force airfield at Khormaksar, but when they fired the first shell the whole area around them was illuminated by the glare and they could see some civilian cars and some pedestrians quite nearly. The guerrillas thought they had been seen and recognised, so they stopped their attack and fled by car; but when they got to the regrouping point, we discovered they had left one rocket at the site of the attack and they were ordered to go back and find it. Two of them went back, imagining all the time that they would fall into the hands of British soldiers, but when they reached the spot they found no-one there, and they remained till they had found the rocket. This increased the guerrillas' determination and made the enemy less frightening.

From then on our operations became more courageous, and a group of guerrillas were brought to the Tawahi area, headquarters of the Middle East Command of the British Forces. They climbed a hill overlooking the British broadcasting station and from there they fired their bazookas, damaging the building, and killing a number of British soldiers who were guarding the station. They then worked their way back on foot through the hills to the town. We of course had in the beginning to use various kinds of cover, including masks, false number plates and official uniforms. We would prepare the people doing the operation, fix the cars with fake plates, and agree on a meeting place afterwards. After the operation had been carried out we would then hide all our equipment, put the right numbers back on the cars and then go out walking on the streets in order to know what the popular reaction had been.

After our first setback, when the authorities detained some active guerrilla elements, we decided to hit at the personnel of the intelligence services (the Special Branch), both British and locally-recruited, since we realised that unless we did something they would be able to finish our guerrilla activities. We warned the officers of local origin not to harrass the guerrillas, but this seemed to have little effect and we then decided to assassinate one of their top men, someone called Fadhli Khalil. This was to be done in the middle of Crater market, where this man normally met people. Guerrillas wearing masks then drove a car with false number-plates to the spot and machine-gunned Khalil to death: the popular response was one of great curiosity,

so we had to throw a smoke bomb to cover the getaway, and people ran away or fell to the ground believing it was a hand grenade. After that we assassinated a number of Special Branch officers, and thereby removed the obstacles to our developing guerrilla activity.

Until the end of 1965 the colonialists were unable to control the guerrilla movement, and London became concerned about the situation. But the establishment of FLOSY in January 1966 for a time held up the inherent progression from a stage of underground activity to one of more direct confrontation. Only at the end of 1966 and in 1967 were we able to go ahead, and military operations then involved more open movements, with our forces taking up positions on rooftops, fighting street battles against enemy infantry positions and patrols, and using mortars and bazooka shells. In response, the occupation forces moved from offensive to defensive positions, concentrating in their military camps and in the residential areas used by British Officers - in Khormaksar, Tawahi, Ma'ala, Bureika and parts of Crater. But this did not force us to decrease our activities; on the contrary it provided us with the opportunity to move into a new phase of action, i.e. one in which we launched proper attacks on enemy positions rather than just relying on hit and run tactics. The British intensified the defenses around the areas where soldiers and their families lived, and put up concrete barriers in lanes and street entrances; but we switched using mortars and bazookas which we could use from a distance. In a number of operations we used heavy mortars, and in one of them we attacked the airport at Khormaksar, hitting some of the RAF planes on the ground there. The guerrillas then withdrew and were chased by helicopters, which they fired on with machine guns; one helicopter continued chasing them and opened fire from a low altitude, but even so the guerrillas were able to get cover and hide the heavy mortar. On another occasion, we used a mortar of this kind which we positioned in the Rodha area of Ma'ala and used to bombard the Middle East Command buildings in Tawahi; although the British soon threw a cordon around the Tawahi area, our people withdrew safely. Amongst the most violent confrontations were those that took place during the visit of the UN Fact-Finding Mission to Aden in April 1967. Clashes continually occurred while the Mission was in Aden, and in these battles we used light machine guns, hand grenades and bazookas, while the British used aircraft and tanks to support their infantry.

These are some of the incidents that made up our experience of urban guerrilla warfare, and the crowning episode was the occupation of Crater on 20 June 1967. We held the area for more than a fortnight, and this represented a turning-point in the whole armed struggle: it served to mobilise the masses in the rural areas who seized power in place after place overthrowing the Sultans who had ruled there. The Crater occupation took place within the context of the Arab world as a whole at that time: Israel had just defeated the armies of the Arab states and occupied a lot of Arab territory, and the British thought they could use this situation to strike a blow at the revolution; in this they were encouraged by the fact that the population had been demoralised by the defeat and had been cowed as a result. The British therefore tried to remove some of the pro-NLF elements from the South Arabian Army and the police and to attack the guerrillas: but in fact, this only created a common bond between the members of the security forces and the guerrillas and led to an armed insurrection in Crater town. Arms were seized and distributed to guerrillas and NLF supporters; clashes with British troops took place in which some were killed and the rest forced to flee. Several military vehicles were destroyed and some helicopters shot down. Then, after the NLF had established complete control of the town, it set up its own administration and deployed its forces on the hill tops around Crater and at the entrance to the town. Clashes then occurred at various points in Ma'ala and elsewhere between our forces and the British troops.

While the occupation of Crater lasted, the British tried in various ways to regain control. They encircled the town to prevent any arms from reaching the guerrillas, but this did not prevent us from defending it; later they flew in Commando groups to regain control and re-occupied the town from the Marine Drive area where they encountered opposition. They put up the British flag in every street they re-took and they were, of course, militarily far more powerful than us. But we were not trying to retain control of Crater, since we had won the political victory which we had set out to achieve.

FOOTNOTES.

1. The centre of opposition in the 1950s had been Aden, where the Aden Trades Union Congress had led a series of militant strikes in opposition to British rule.

2. The Movement of Arab Nationalists was established in Beirut in the early 1950s by a group of Palestinian nationalists, amongst them George Habbash and Nayyef Hawatmeh. After some years of support for Nasserist policies, and after MAN groups had been established in several Arab countries, the Movement split into self-proclaimed "Marxist-Leninist" and nationalist fractions and disintegrated as a coherent force. The PFLP and the DPFLP in the Palestinian resistance, and the South Yemeni NLF and the People's Front for the Liberation of Oman are all former MAN branches.

3. The "Fake Federation" was the Federation of Amirates established by Britain in South Yemen in 1959.

4. North Yemen had remained outside the control of Britain and since the beginning of the 20th Century had been ruled by absolute rulers claiming religious authority, the Imams. In September 1962 a nationalist group of officers in the North Yemeni army staged a coup, but the Imam escaped and rallied Royalist tribesmen, with Saudi Aid. An 8 year civil war followed.

5. The People's Socialist Party was the political expression of the Aden Trades Union Congress.

6. Sanaa is the capital of North Yemen.

7. For the full list, see Fred Halliday, Arabia without Sultans, 1974, p 191.

8. The Radfan mountains lay on the border with North Yemen, some miles to the north of Aden.

9. The Salafi Youth Organisation was an expression of the local communists. It was named after Abdullah Abd al-Majid Salafi, a communist trades union leader assassinated by FLOSY in 1966. At the beginning of the armed struggle, the period Abdul Fatah Ismail is referring to here, the group was in fact known as the Popular Democratic Union.

10. The Ba'th party were in power in Syria and Iraq at the time, but were were in disagreement with Egyptian policies in the Arab world.

11. This reflected a break with the theoretical tenet of Nasserism, that "Arab" socialism differed from other socialisms, by not being atheistic or believing in class struggle.

12. In the summer of 1967, six of the twenty or more constituent members of the Aden Trades Union Congress broke with FLOSY and rallied to the NLF.

13. Crater is the oldest part of Aden. Its occupation by the NLF in June 1967 symbolised the defeat of British rule in South Yemen.

14. In the period June-August 1967, as British forces pulled out of the South Yemeni hinterland in preparation for independence at the end of the year, NLF groups were able to gain control of the twenty-odd Sultanates of the interior, and either capture their rulers or force them into exile.

15. The South Arabian League was a nationalist group run by some Sultans and their supporters outside Aden. It was opposed to unity of the two Yemens.

16. This was an army with British officers and a rank-and-file drawn from certain pro-British tribes in South Yemen.

17. In March 1968 the army of the South Yemen Republic tried unsuccessfully to stage a coup.

18. The various towns that make up Aden are located on the sides of a volcanic mountain, which the guerrillas were able to use in escaping from British forces. Crater is, as its name implies, in the (extinct) centre of the formation.

OUR STRUGGLE CONTINUES

THE PEOPLE'S FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF OMAN

The following interview with Said Messaoud, a PFLO leader, was first published in February 1976, in the fortnightly Afrique-Asie

Q. What is the present situation in Oman?

A. Our struggle continues, despite Qabus's claims of victory. Besides, The Iranians and the British continue to strengthen their presence, a clear proof that the war is still going on.

Q. Are the Jordanians still in Oman?

A. They withdrew some of their forces as a result of the considerable losses they suffered and the agitation these losses brought about within the army and the country. But Jordanian officers still interrogate prisoners and supervise the intelligence service. Jordanians are found in all the Omani prisons where militants from the Front are held, particularly in Jalali (Muscat), near the oil fields at Fahud, and in Nizwa in the desert. They pratise the same methods of torture as the Israelis use against Palestinians: this shows that the Zionists taught them how to interrogate political prisoners.

Q. Why doesn't Saudi Arabia intervene more decisively in support of Qabus?

A. It is true that during King Faisal's reign, Saudi financial and other assistance to Qabus's regime was very considerable. For example, Riyadh paid for the 30 Hawker Hunter jets which Qabus bought from Jordan. These are the very planes which King Hussein wanted to sell to South Africa, but was prevented from doing so as a result of protests from the Organisation of African Unity and the Arab League.

We have noticed with considerable interest the statement made by the new King, Khaled, which was published in the Lebanese paper 'al-Anwar', and the daily 'al-Kabas'. In this statement, Khaled expressed his concern at Iranian intervention in our country, and said that the people of Oman should be left to solve their problems amongst themselves. But of course, Saudi financial aid to Qabus continues.

Q. Muscat's Foreign Minister, Qais al Zawawi has stated that if an Arab country were to offer to replace the Iranian army in Oman to fight against the guerrillas there, his government would reject the offer. Isn't this a change of attitude by Qabus who used to justify the Shah's intervention by explaining that Iran was the only country which had responded to his appeal for assistance?

A. Not at all. This declaration fits in perfectly with the present regime's surrender of national sovereignty. The men in power are nothing more than compradors who are selling our country to the highest bidder. In our view Oman is still a British colony, although it is increasingly becoming and Iranian colony.

Iran has taken over a small Omani island in the straits of Hormuz, Umm al Ghanam, and developed it as a military base. Iran has also built a base at Khassab in the Musandam peninsula. All this is being done with

the Sultan's agreement. The Shah of Iran and his prime minister Hoveida have stated that even if their army - which we now estimate at 25 000 men - were to withdraw from Oman, they would continue to occupy these two bases. Thamrit in Dhofar is also an Iranian base which operates in conjunction with the British base in Salalah and the Anglo-American base on the island of Masirah. Just to give an example of Muscat's servility to the Shah, when the latter threatened the Arab countries because they had planned the creation of an 'Arab' Gulf News Agency, Qais al-Zawawi flew to Teheran to beg the emperor's forgiveness, specifying that Muscat had had nothing to do with this project.

Q. Are you still hostile to the planned Regional Security Pact, which is to include all the countries bordering the Gulf?

A. Our position, which we have made public in June 1975, is that such a plan is directed against the interests of the people in the area. The plan does indeed exist, but we don't think it can succeed. The Shah's hegemonistic tendencies are far too obvious to allow even the most reactionary Arab regimes to sign a long-term agreement with him. Moreover, Iran is merely the bridge head of US imperialism in the area. Iran has replaced Israel in the imperialist strategy of surrounding the Arab peoples; it is the chosen and consenting gendarme of Western interests.

Q. Iran, Britain and the USA support Qabus because they say that if you took power in Muscat, travel through the Straits of Hormuz would be threatened; and your allies, the Socialist countries and the Arab progressive states, would set up bases on your territory.

A. These justifications for agression against our people do not even have the merit of coherence. It is hard to understand how reasonable people could believe these fantasies. Why should we hinder free passage through an international seaway? We of course have no such plans. It would be in the interests neither of our people nor of the other peoples in the region. As for our allies, their assistance is without any ulterior motive. We would not accept aid with strings attached. We follow no capital's lead, neither in the Arab world, nor elsewhere. As for the rumours directed against the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, I can assure you they are without any foundation. Relations between our two peoples are solid and very lasting.

COUNTER INSURGENCY OLD AND NEW: THE CASE OF OMAN [1]

Fred Halliday

The war in Oman, which began in 1965 in Dhofar, the southern province of that country, has been characterised by two paradoxes. First of all, it has been in one sense a small-scale and obscure conflict, involving relatively few people in a remote mountain region. Very little has ever been heard about it, in the Middle East or elsewhere. Yet this is no backyard police operation: far more than Vietnam or any war in Africa or Latin America, it affects control of a major economic asset of the capitalist world - Gulf oil[2]. Although to a certain extent the result of its scale, the obscurity that surrounds the war is also the result of a deliberate policy of concealing, or at least minimising, its significance; and the apparent insignificance is eloquently contradicted by the fact that, although Britain was initially the sole outside party involved, the conflict in Dhofar has become a highly *internationalised* one, in which at least nine foreign powers have participated in the campaigns to crush the guerrillas. The participation of these powers is illustrative not only of the fact that the suppression of the Dhofar guerrillas is essential to the region's stability, but also to a new inter-state system being built in the Gulf. A second characteristic paradox follows from this, namely that the war in Dhofar *combines* elements of a traditional British colonial war with those of a post-colonial counter-insurgency operation, of a kind that is likely to recur in the last quarter of the 20th Century. It is therefore probably the last of the old campaigns and, while not the first, one of the first half-dozen of the new, simultaneously a retrospective on a century of British colonial control and an index of some of what is to come.

The apparent military consolidation of the counter-revolutionary forces in Oman in 1975 stands in contrast to the overall record of that year, which is to a considerable degree one of triumph for revolutionary guerrilla movements. In Indochina the US and their allies fled as Cambodia, Vietnam and finally Laos fell to the popular forces. In Africa the independent states of Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau were established in the wake of the Portuguese retreat; by the end of the year, even in Angola, the MPLA after an uncertain start was well on the way to controlling the whole country with Cuban support. In a number of other states - in Malaya, Iran, Palestine, the Basque country, Eritrea, Chad, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Argentina - guerrillas of various political characters, operating in many kinds of social and geographical contexts, were able at least to continue their operations. Elsewhere it *was* a different story: in Portugal's East Indian colony, Timor, the under-equipped FRETILIN forces were driven into the mountains by an Indonesian invasion, and in Oman the Sultan and his foreign supporters were able to impose control on most of the Dhofar province; while some guerrillas have remained in central and eastern Dhofar, the majority have taken up defensive positions along the border with South Yemen.

The analysis provided here will attempt to assess the balance of forces operating in Dhofar, to identify the determining objective forces, especially since guerrilla war is often a very costly and unpleasant form of revolutionary struggle. Despite the record of 1975, it has in most cases been defeated. We are now a long way from the triumphalist rhetoric of the mid-1960s, from Che Guevara's "two, three, many Vietnams" and Lin Piao's villages encircling the towns on a global scale. The USA has developed and diffused a new technology and theory of counter-insurgency which has had its successes: in Latin America, except for Argentina, every rural and urban guerrilla movement, including the Tupamaros, has been defeated. In India and Zaire, two hopes of the 60s the revolutionary movements have been at least temporarily crushed; whilst in Indonesia and Chile the left has had no effective reply, guerrilla or otherwise, to the Army's overthrow of the progressive regimes. As we shall see, the record of British colonialism since 1945 has also been disturbingly successful on the military level at least.

THE NEW ORDER IN THE GULF

The new system or order taking shape in the Gulf is intended to effect the transitions and resolve the tensions that began in the late 1950s; by 1975 the main components of the new order were established[3]. Four main points can be identified:

1. DECOLONISATION: Until the mid-1950s Britain dominated most of the Arabian coastline, and maintained a predominant influence in Iraq. Only Saudi Arabia and Iran, monarchies under US influence, and North Yemen, the only truly independent Arabian state, remained outside British control. A military coup ousted British influence in Iraq in 1958; in 1961 Kuwait became independent, whilst a decade later three other small Gulf states followed (Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Amirates). The two most difficult cases were South Yemen and Oman. In the former, Britain failed to sustain the government of its choosing and had to hand over power to the nationalist guerrilla movement, the National Liberation Front, in 1967. In the latter Britain never admitted to having a colonial position, and the change here was therefore more implicit and gradual: in fact in contrast to Oman's allegedly non-colonial status, that country has remained the one where the British position is strongest, but where Iran has acquired a powerful position in the early 1970s. The US hold in Saudi Arabia and Iran was by contrast always informal and not colonial in any strict sense of that term: the evolution of these two states from the mid-1960s onwards, with the Shah's white revolution and King Feisal's modernisation, has made them stronger and more independent entities.

2. CONTAINING REVOLUTION: Two major threats to the establishment of a new order in the Gulf began with the Iraqi coup of 1958 and the North Yemeni coup of 1962. The former undermined the Baghdad Pact - Baghdad being the capital of Iraq, the organisation had to be renamed the Central Treaty Organisation[4]. For a decade and a half, the succession of military juntas in Iraq threatened Kuwait, fought the Kurds, and quarrelled with Iran; they also made some attempt to encourage nationalist forces elsewhere in the Gulf.

But the agreement between Iran and Iraq in March 1975 seems to have ended this period: Iraq is now being re-integrated into the Gulf system, its major disputes are settled, or at least shelved, and its own government appears politically and economically more secure. The North Yemeni coup of 1962 represented a more serious threat to the emergence of a new order, since it released popular movements in territories under British rule. Although a conservative solution to the North Yemeni civil war was found in 1970, after eight years of conflict, the 1962 coup led to the outbreak of guerrilla war in Aden which, after four years of struggle, enabled the NLF to establish a People's Republic. Moreover after the start of guerrilla war in South Yemen in 1963, a guerrilla movement also began in Dhofar. By 1967, when Britain was scheduled to leave South Yemen, there was no alternative to accepting the NLF as the government there; but for several years after independence, South Yemeni exiles and other forces, supported by Saudi Arabia, tried to attack across the Republic's borders and undermine the regime. Now South Yemen has been, at least temporarily, accepted. In March 1976, Saudi Arabia even agreed to extend diplomatic recognition. As with Cuba, years of isolation failed to topple the government there. In Oman however, the counter-revolutionary forces have tried with more determination and success to eliminate the revolutionary movement, to stem the tide of popular opposition at the South Yemeni borders; the movement has been weaker than in South Yemen and Oman borders the oil producing areas. It has therefore been more possible and more necessary to crush the guerrillas there.

3. SAUDI IRANIAN CONDOMINIUM: As Britain withdrew from the region in the 1960s, Saudi Arabia and Iran became the two dominant powers in the region. The dominant military role has fallen to Iran: it has a far larger population and army, whilst the main financial role has fallen to Saudi Arabia, whose influence spreads into many parts of the Arab world[5]. Iranian troops have fought in Oman, Iraq Kurdistan and the Baluchistan area of Pakistan; Iranian advisers have served in North Yemen; Iranian Phantom jets were sent to South Vietnam in 1972; and Iranian naval vessels have begun to patrol the Indian Ocean in co-operation with South Africa. Saudi Arabia on the other hand financed the royalist forces in the North Yemeni civil war, is aiding the denationalisation of the economies in Egypt and the Sudan, and has provided funds for the Sultan of Oman since 1971. Beyond the partnership of these two powers lies the prospect of a comprehensive Gulf security agreement involving the larger and smaller states including Iraq. Such a system, which has been under discussion since 1974 could be formal or informal, but in effect it would reproduce the Baghdad Pact in a post-colonial era, and ensure an integrated and stable repressive system in the whole region. As such it forms part of a wider shift to the right in the Arab world of which the central component has been Egypt's alliance with the USA, a shift which everywhere marks the end of the nationalist wave that began in the 1950s.

4. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL MODERNISATION: Despite the production of oil for some decades, the societies of the Gulf and the Peninsula had hardly been affected at all by economic development until the mid-1950s. In the last two decades there has been a process of accelerated and interconnected change: increasing oil revenues, virtual nationalisation of the oil industry, expansion of civilian and military state

structures, construction of infrastructures and welfare services. The availability of the oil revenues makes these changes possible; the need to preserve the existing regimes makes them essential. There have been considerable problems in this domain: in nearly all states sections of the ruling class have opposed the changes (Iranian landowners, Saudi traditionalists), and at times there have been acrimonious quarrels between the producer states and the oil companies over pricing and supply, quarrels that in 1973-74 led to threats on the part of the USA to invade the region. Nevertheless the overall record so far has been one or relatively harmonious and successful transformation of these states, a process that is still in its early stages.

INTERNATIONALISATION IN OMAN

Of all the states in the region, Oman was the least affected by these policies until the British ousted reigning Sultan Said bin Taimur in 1970 and installed his son Qabus. Till then Britain retained sole economic, political and military control. The state was weak, indeed ramshackle: there were only 3 primary schools and in Dhofar the army had lost all of the populated area except the capital, Salala, to the guerrillas. There had been no economic development of any kind, except for limited oil production which began in 1967. Then, in response to the guerrilla threat and to the anomalous isolation of Oman, the country was belatedly introduced into the new order. Foreign companies moved in: Japanese, US, German, Swedish as well as British[6]. The state machine was expanded and staffed with expatriates or English-speaking Arabs from East Africa where local personnel were wanting. Roads, schools, hospitals, newspapers, television were introduced. And most importantly of all the armed forces were expanded. The army, The Sultan's Armed Forces, were expanded from around 3,000 to over 12,000. The Sultan of Oman's Air Force (SOAF) and the Sultan of Oman's Navy (SON) were likewise developed and acquired new equipment.

Yet this expansion of the Omani military apparatus is in some ways misleading. Within the Sultan's forces, foreign personnel play an important role. Up to half of the soldiers in the SAF are mercenaries from the impoverished plateau of Baluchistan, in Pakistan. All the top personnel, officers and training staff, in the three branches are British, and "Omanisation" has so far gone very slowly. More importantly, there have been definite limits to the expansion of the "Sultan's" forces which have only been supplemented by the introduction of other military forces. By 1975 at least nine foreign states had military personnel in Oman. Britain has over 1,500 men: about 700 are running the two RAF bases at Salala and Masirah; another 300 are mercenaries formerly in the British Army, commanded by serving British officers; the rest are either seconded British personnel, including the commanders of SAF, SOAF, and SON; or are members of the so-called British Army Training Team, a force drawn from the counter-insurgency regiment of the Special Air Services, and used both for training Omani troops and for behind-the-lines missions.

The two other states with considerable contingents in Oman have been Jordan and Iran. Jordan has deployed several thousand troops there and also provided experts for the police and intelligence services: the main body of these came in 1972-73, and it appears that most of the ground troops were withdrawn in late 1975. Iran began sending

forces in 1972 when 30 helicopters and their crews were provided; but the main body, an estimated 4,000 troops, came in December 1973. In addition to these three states two neighbouring Arab countries, the United Arab Amirates and Saudi Arabia have provided garrisons which have released SAF forces to fight at the front. Both Saudi Arabia and the Amirates have also provided financial aid. And it is a striking indication of Saudi Arabia's military weakness that it, Oman's giant neighbour, cannot provide the forces to crush a movement in Dhofar which it opposes[7]. Further training activities have been carried out by officers from Pakistan, as well as by smaller groups from India and the Sudan. Their officers probably knew English and have worked on British equipment. Finally, in 1975, the USA sent a small training team to instruct the SAF in the use of TOW anti-tank missiles.

This internationalisation reflects two things: the weakness of the Omani and British positions, and a deliberate integration of Oman into the Gulf's new order. As we have seen not only has Oman been incapable of providing the officers and commanders required but it has even had to draw many of its rank-and-file from Baluchistan. Britain too has been unable to meet the added requirements of the war, even if it had wanted to, since it is militarily overextended: with upwards of 15,000 troops in Northern Ireland since 1971, it has already been unable to meet its full commitment to NATO forces in Germany and could not have spared the forces for an Omani campaign. In addition, the commitment of large numbers of ground troops could have aroused political opposition at home. To fulfill the requirements of the Oman campaign, troops each have been drawn from the two regional states capable of providing them - Jordan and Iran. These armies - have been trained for some decades on western equipment; politically the countries are repressive monarchies, where no opposition to the involvement in Oman is likely to emerge. The political front inside agressor states, so important in offsetting military disadvantages on the field of battle, has therefore been closed to the guerrillas. But the intervention of other powers served their specific interests too. Both Iran and Jordan have a strategic interest in sustaining a fellow conservative monarch, whilst the Shah has benefitted from the opportunity to train his forces in anti-guerrilla actions.

This internationalisation is significant in a broader historical perspective. During the century of imperial domination (from the mid-nineteenth Century to 1945) each imperial power tended to deal on its own with enemies within its spheres of influence. An exception to this was the expedition by a coalition of imperial powers against the Chinese nationalist forces, the so-called "Boxers", in 1900[8]. But this was in a territory over which no specific states claimed jurisdiction. Another exception occurred after the Russian Revolution in 1917 when a joint counter-revolutionary intervention was mounted to try to crush the new regime. It was after World War 11 that co-operation increased substantially: Britain intervened in former Dutch and French colonies in the Far East (Vietnam, Indonesia) to restore their weaker colleagues (1945), whilst the USA encouraged the establishment of a number of regional alliances - NATO, SEATO, the Baghdad Pact.

Even the latter tended to be primarily designed to confront the Soviet Union and China; in their colonies, the respective powers - British, French, Dutch, Belgian, Portuguese - continued to

handle their own affairs, as the USA did in Latin America. A new development was the Korean War (1950-54). The USA had occupied this former Japanese colony in 1945 and, using its control of the UN, had mobilised an international force when war broke out in 1950. No less than 15 other states fought with the USA and the South Korean forces. But this internationalisation was a political rather than a military one: in 1953, when there were 350,000 US troops in Korea, there were only 44,000 from the other states combined[9]. In Vietnam a similar political internationalisation occurred: the main fighting was done by South Vietnamese and US troops, with much smaller contingents from South Korea, the Philippines and Thailand, and some support from Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and Iran.

In one sense, Korea and Vietnam were transitional cases. Old-style internationalisation consisted of a group of states uniting against a specific enemy, as the European powers had done against Napoleon, and the imperial powers had against the Boxers and the Bolsheviks. New-style internationalisation involves an alliance between former imperial powers and new, militarily capable, regional powers. In Korea and Vietnam, elements of the new internationalisation can be seen, but in reality most of the fighting was done by the USA and its own local ally within the country concerned. The new internationalisation is much clearer in two other cases: Sri-Lanka and Oman. In April 1971 an underground movement backed mainly by peasant youth, the Janatha Vimukhti Peramuna, staged an armed insurrection against the Bandaranaike government[10]. The movement was crushed within six weeks, but not before a number of foreign states had sent in aid to back up the Sri-Lanka armed forces: Britain, the USA, the Soviet Union and China all did so; so too did India, Pakistan and Yugoslavia. While no forces from these countries fought on the ground, their aid was a substantial boost to the beleaguered government and illustrated a new pattern of military co-operation.

In Oman, we can see the new internationalisation in its clearest form, with forces from an old imperial power supporting two regional powers fighting on the ground; here the old imperial power plays a less active role on the front line than its two partners. Moreover, not only does Iran provide troops, but it also assumes responsibility for the air defense of Oman, stationing missiles and Phantom jets near the border with South Yemen. And this Iranian role provides the clue to deciphering one of the more hidden aspects of the war, the role of the USA. Formally, the only US involvement is minuscule - the provision of some TOW anti-tank missiles and of a small, temporary, training team[11]. But since 1971 the CIA has been providing financial aid through Saudi Arabia to Oman, and is providing electronic surveillance of the Omani coast under the cover of civilian American fishing ships. The most substantial US contribution, however, has come through the Iranian force, since the USA provides most of the equipment and service facilities for the Iranians. Several hundred US technicians are employed in Iran under contract to the Iranian army and air force: whilst most are probably located in Iran itself, some at least may have been stationed in Oman itself. And the distinction is, in any case, trivial: it matters little whether a broken-down or damaged US helicopter gunship is repaired on the strip at Salala by a US technician, or whether the gunship is taken back to Iran for the same purpose.

Both the US and Britain play a vital role in the Oman war, but one that is not concentrated on the battle-field itself. The British SAS troops that fought on the front line in 1971 did so as irregular forces and

in secret: there will no doubt be a role in the future for such small, highly mobile forces from the ex-imperial nations in counter-insurgency operations (the SAS could return to Malaya), but the main combat role will generally fall to the regional armies. This is the essence of the Nixon doctrine. Here Oman bears comparison with other such operations: in Timor, where it was the Indonesian armed forces that attacked FRETILIN; in Angola, where it was Zaire and South Africa which sent troops and passed on CIA money to the anti-MPLA forces; in Latin America, where Brazil, although not getting massively involved, has intervened in Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina to support counter-revolutionary forces. No US troops have been landed in Latin America since the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965; yet US- trained forces have crushed guerrilla movements and assisted coups, a process in which Brazil has played the leading role[12].

BRITISH COUNTER INSURGENCY

This internationalisation of the Oman war, and the delegation of roles to regional powers with the support of Britain and the USA has been superimposed on a conflict similar to others fought by the British army for a century and to which the lessons of this long experience have been applied. Indeed of all the colonial power powers' the British experience in counter-insurgency is probably the richest. The Dutch (in Indonesia), the French (in Algeria) and the Portuguese (in southern Africa) all carried out counter-insurgency operations in their colonies. During World War II, Hitler's Wehrmacht carried out counter-partisan campaigns in Eastern Europe especially in Russia and Yugoslavia). And the USA's actions in the Philippines (after 1896) and in Haiti (1916-1934) gave the US repressive apparatus a foretaste of its later operations. The British experience was gained in establishing, retaining and then terminating an Empire; it falls into three main phases: the century between the accession of Queen Victoria and the outbreak of World War II (1837-1939); the Second World War itself (1939-1945); and the three decades of counter-insurgency warfare since then (1945-1975).

In each of these periods the British army acquired an experience that helped it to face subsequent threats, even though these threats did not necessarily come from the same kind of enemy: there is a world of political difference between the South Arabian guerrillas of to-day and the Pathans of the North-West Frontier in the 19th Century. In the period of Queen Victoria's rule (to 1901) the British fought over 45 small colonial wars: characteristic of the period were the campaigns in India against the nationalist uprising of 1857, in the Sudan against the Mahdi, in South Africa against the Zulus, and later the Boers, in the Middle East against the Egyptians, and in the Far East against the people of China. In this century of colonial rule, by 1939 they had acquired a number of skills later put to good use: in India and Africa they developed the techniques of constructing native armies using British officers; in the Boer war they developed the system of population control - 20,000 Boers died of disease in concentration camps, after the British Army had divided the countryside with barbed wire and built over 8,000 block houses. In the 1920s, in Iraq, Somalia and South Yemen,

the RAF pioneered the use of airpower against colonial enemies, as a mechanism of control far more economical than the use of ground troops.

The second phase of British counter-insurgency experience, World War II, was mainly a war against a conventional enemy, but it provided lessons that were extremely useful in postwar campaigns, as well as supplying the personnel for such activities. In the war against Japan in South-East Asia, the British developed techniques of jungle warfare which were later codified and taught at a Jungle Warfare School at Kota Tingi in Malaya, an establishment at which US, Thai, Philippine and other troops were trained during the Vietnam War[13]. Another World War II development was the setting up of the Special Air Services Regiment, a unit of volunteers used originally for operations behind German lines in the North African desert and subsequently re-organised for counter-insurgency operations[14]. Finally, the postwar campaigns borrowed heavily on the experiences of the British Army in psychological warfare against the German occupation forces in Europe.

In the postwar period, Britain has lost its Empire, but it has also fought over thirty medium and small-scale military operations to crush forces it did not want to hand over power to, or to dictate the terms on which it did hand over power. It has faced the problem that the forces it was fighting in the colonies, while militarily weak, have been politically on the ascendant; added to this is the problem that Britain's military posture has been directed against a conventional enemy - Russia. The latter problem has been solved by the fact that no war with Russia actually occurred and the three conventional campaigns Britain has fought have been against colonial foes: Korea (1950-1954), Suez (1956), and Kuwait (1961).

Leaving aside these three conventional operations and some subversive operations there have been over 30 medium and small operations in the colonial arena during the post-war period[15]. Of these 10 were of significant dimensions - i.e. they involved several thousand troops, over a number of years, in sizeable military operations. These ten were:

1. *Greece, 1944-1947:* this was a war to restore the Greek monarchy and to crush the communist guerrillas who controlled most of the country in 1944. British troops launched the first counter-offensive in 1944-45 and Britain supported the Greek Royalists until the USA took over main responsibility in 1947 (the Truman doctrine).

2. *Palestine 1946-1948:* this was a campaign by the British Army against the underground Jewish forces fighting to establish an Israeli state. Britain pulled out in 1948, leaving the field open for the first Arab-Israeli war.

3. *Malaya, 1948-1960:* this was the most protracted and important postwar operation: the military campaign of the Malayan Communist party was defeated although it has now revived again in the mid-1970s.

4. *Kenya, 1953-1956:* The campaign of the Land Freedom Army (known abusively by the British as "Mau'Mau") was militarily crushed, but in 1960 Kenya became independent under Jomo Kenyatta, the leader of that campaign.

5. *Cyprus 1955-1959:* Here the military campaign of EOKA was contained, if not defeated, but the British government in the end handed power over to the forces led by Archbishop Makarios.

6. *Oman, 1957-59:* This was a campaign to crush a nationalist uprising by the tribes of the interior of Northern Oman, who were backed by Egypt, Russia and China and to some extent by Saudi Arabia and the USA as well. The movement was destroyed militarily in early 1959.

7. *South Yemen 1963-1967:* Beginning as a guerrilla war in the mountains north of Aden, this campaign spread to the town of Aden itself in 1964 and in the end Britain withdrew and handed power to the National Liberation Front.

8. *Borneo 1961-1965:* This was a campaign along the border between Malaysia and Indonesia on the island of Borneo, in which the guerrillas received the support of Indonesian President Sukarno. His policy of "confrontation" ended with the coup which overthrew his regime in September 1965.

9. *Oman II, 1965 onwards.*

10. *Northern Ireland, 1969 onwards:* What began as an operation to keep feuding catholic and protestant communities apart, has since 1972 become the world's most developed urban guerrilla conflict, with the British Army facing attack from both catholic and protestant groups and the two communities attacking each other. Despite the different political character, many of the technical-military aspects are similar to those in other counter-insurgency campaigns.

The conditions under which these campaigns were fought were predominantly rural, varying from Jungle conditions (Malaya, Kenya, Borneo, OmanII) to more arid and desert conditions (Oman I, the South Yemeni mountains). Some of the rural campaigns had an urban component (Kenya, South Yemen) whilst two were predominantly urban counter-insurgency campaigns (Cyprus, Northern Ireland). The rural ones bore most resemblance to the classic colonial campaigns of the imperial epoch. However, the most striking feature of the eight campaigns that are now over is that the British Army has been relatively successful in its operations. In four campaigns the enemy were militarily and politically defeated: Greece, Malaya, OmanI, Borneo. In two others the guerrillas were either militarily almost crushed (kenya) or contained (Cyprus) before a political agreement between them and Britain was reached.

The political balance sheet is even more favourable: in addition to the four outright victories, Kenya and Cyprus were in the end politically favourable to Britain, and the independent states allowed British troops to retain facilities in their countries. In Palestine too the British had little cause for political concern: eight years after the forces who fought Britain had established the state of Israel, the latter's army had joined with France and Britain in a military campaign against Nasser's Egypt. Only in South Yemen did a guerrilla movement challenge the terms of British decolonisation and win against determined British opposition, after which it continued to support the guerrilla movement in the neighbouring state of Oman.

THE OMANI EXPERIENCE

The accumulated legacy of British counter-insurgency has therefore been drawn from a wide variety of experience and has produced a body of lessons that is available not only to the British Army but also to the armies of Britain's allies (the USA in Vietnam, the Portuguese in Africa) and to the new regional powers[16]. Three of the ten significant post-war campaigns have been fought in South Arabia: one in South Yemen and the other two in Oman.

The first Omani war (1957-1959) took place in the barren mountains of northern Oman, and ended when British SAS troops stormed the guerrilla stronghold on the main mountain plateau of the interior in January 1959. This earlier campaign demonstrated that the position of the Sultan was militarily very weak: his army of around 2,500 relied on British officers and Baluchi mercenaries. The so-called Sultan of Oman's Air Force was a hastily assembled force, created by the British in 1958 and relying entirely on British pilots and servicing personnel. The British were able to crush the rebellion because the latter was poorly organised and armed and because its bases were easily surrounded; air attacks on villages and irrigation channels, combined with the introduction of SAS forces from Malaya finally overcame resistance. Indeed it was the success of the SAS units in Oman that formed the basis of Britain's defence policy in the early 1960s, in which mobile units of British troops were to be held ready to intervene east of Suez where need so dictated[17].

The second Omani war has taken place in quite different social and geographical conditions in the southern province of Dhofar. Although at first led by a traditional tribal leadership, the guerrilla movement was in 1968 transformed into a self-proclaimed revolutionary People's Front which sought to liberate the whole Gulf and to carry through a social revolution in the area it has freed. By 1970 the guerrillas had conquered nearly the whole of the inhabited mountainous part of Dhofar (two-thirds of the province is desert), and were able to shell the RAF installations in the Dhofari capital, Salala. It was only in July 1970 that the British deposed the reigning Sultan, installed his son Qabus who had been trained at British military establishments, and began a counter-offensive which with Iranian and Jordanian help had reconquered much of Dhofar by the end of 1975.

The course of this war reflects the advantages and disadvantages enjoyed by each side. The geography of the Dhofar region gives the guerrillas some advantages in their campaign. The operative military area is about 200 miles long and 20-50 miles deep, a block of tropical hills between the desert and the sea which from June to September enjoys monsoon rains. Here the People's Front have enjoyed two advantages: first there are good on-the-ground conditions, with very rough country, virtually no roads, relatively thick vegetation and a mass of limestone caves enabling them to store supplies, hide and shelter with ease; secondly, at its south-west end Dhofar borders on South Yemen, which since independence in 1967 has supported the guerrillas with arms, food and facilities. But against these guerrilla advantages must be set the greater geographical advantages enjoyed by the counter-insurgency forces.

First the total area to be controlled is very small - less than 10,000 square miles - and hence presents far smaller problems of subjugation than most recent counter-insurgency campaigns (South Vietnam for example is over sixty times larger). The population is at most 200,000. Secondly the guerrilla area is extremely exposed, particularly near the South Yemeni border where the tropical cover is less than four miles across between the desert and the sea. Moreover, not only have the Sultan's forces been able to bombard the liberated areas from the sea and from the air, but they can also do so from the desert; here they enjoy a complete advantage, since the desert, being rather flat and without cover, is unusable by guerrillas. A contrast with Vietnam presents itself here: in Vietnam the guerrillas were exposed from the sea and the US fleet made the most of it, but the NLF were covered on their western flank by Laos and this offered them protection and a number of different supply routes. In Dhofar on the other hand, the counter-insurgency forces control both sides of the combat zone; it is as if the NLF supplies in South Vietnam had had to be brought in over the 17th parallel border and through the DMZ, while the US and allied forces could have attacked from secure bases in Laos, in addition to using their naval and coastal advantages.

A further advantage enjoyed by the counter-insurgency forces has been the fact that their base areas have remained secure. Despite successive attempts in 1970, 1972 and 1974 the People's Front failed to expand its military activities out of Dhofar and, across 500 miles of desert, into Northern Oman. Indeed this desert barrier and the PFLO's weakness in northern Oman have been the most important overall limitations to the expansion of the guerrilla movement. In Dhofar itself, the government headquarters at Salala has been impregnable since it is backed by sea, from which government reinforcements can always be brought in; and it is separated from the mountains by a 10 mile wide radius of flat territory across which the guerrillas, armed only with light weapons have never been able to advance. Although from 1968 to 1973 the guerrillas were able to shell the airfield at Salala and in 1972, they held Mirbat, a coastal town near Salala, for some hours, their operations have in general been confined to the mountain regions.

Nor are the social conditions in the area very favourable to the guerrillas. There has existed a long tradition of tribal unrest in Dhofar, which has been directed against the Omani Sultans, who occupied the area and overtaxed it. Once Dhofari men began to work in the oil states in the 1950s, a nationalist opposition based on these migrant workers began to emerge. But Dhofari society itself retains its predominantly tribal character and especially in the east, the most densely populated part of the region, the guerrilla movement encountered considerable traditionalist opposition. Tribal leaders were prepared to work with the People's Front during the easier phase of struggle (1965-1970); but once the military conditions became harsher and once the Sultan has been able to offer material attractions to the tribes, it became evident that the counter-insurgency campaign had a potential social base in Dhofar, both amongst tribal groups that had been neutral and amongst those that no longer backed the Front.

Another dimension in which the Sultan has an advantage is in the resources at his command. Oil has been produced in Oman since 1967, and the quadrupling of oil prices in 1973, although in no way a result of the Sultan's actions, has brought increased income to the Omani state. In 1974 revenue was $600 millions; consequently the Sultan had the money to purchase the arms and personnel he needed in order to continue the military campaign in Dhofar and to pursue a *hearts and minds* campaign designed to win, or at least confuse, the population (see below).

The People's Front for the Liberation of Oman, by contrast, was able to carry out a development programme in the areas under its control, but it has been hampered both by the lack of financial resources and, later, by the bombardment to which the liberated areas have been subjected. The first schools, medical centres and agricultural developments in Dhofar were all set up by the Front; but since 1970, when the Omani government development programme got under way, the material advantages have been increasingly on the side of the counter-insurgency forces.

The PFLO has also been militarily weak and guerrilla weaponry has remained poor: until 1975 the Front had only a few anti-aircraft guns, some mortars and light artillery plus its AK-47 Kalashnikov rifles. The Front has had no reply to the long-range naval and artillery bombardment of the enemy and only in the autumn of 1975 did they acquire the SAM-7 missiles required to counter British and Iranian air power.

COUNTER INSURGENCY TACTICS IN DHOFAR

In the first five years, up to 1970, the British were on the defensive and merely tried to hold out with their ramshackle army and colonial administration. The main tactics used were traditional ones: villages were burnt to punish the populations, corpses of guerrilla fighters were hung up to rot in the main square in Salala; the mountains were blockaded and Salala itself was ringed with a barbed wire fence so that no food could be taken out or weapons brought in. However, by 1968 the evident and dangerous failure of these policies, and the incompetence of the ruling Sultan who had been in power since 1932, led the British to plan alternative measures. The 1970 coup then took place.

The first major counter-offensive occurred in October-November 1971, when the government established new positions in the eastern Dhofari mountains after a combined force of British and Omani troops had attacked from the desert. In 1972 a similar operation took place in Western Dhofar and an outpost was built on a 4,000 feet high hill at Sarfeet near the Yemeni border. In 1973, a 35 mile barrier, the Hornbeam line, was built between the desert and the sea some miles west of Salala, and in December of that year Iranian forces opened a road running from Salala through the mountains to the desert. In November-December 1974, the Iranians attacked in Western Dhofar, and by the spring of 1975 they had set up a second barrier, the Demavand line, about 15 miles from the South Yemeni Border, so guerrilla units remaining east of the Demavand and Hornbeam lines have been deprived of supplies and have been easier to attack. In late 1975 the Iranians and SAF were able to build a third line along the border which effectively excluded PFLO forces from Dhofar.

Three specific military factors that have been very useful in Dhofar are air power, long-range bombardment and the contruction of the communications barriers just mentioned. Until 1972-73 the SOAF used its jets and turboprop planes for reconnaissance and for bombarding suspect guerrilla supply lines: the introduction of helicopters by Iran and by SOAF itself (in 1972-73) then enabled the counter-insurgency campaign to establish fortified positions in the mountains such as the one in Sarfeet, which can be supplied only by air. But in the absence of any qualified troops, helicopters cannot be used for heliborne troop attacks, and the first time Omani ground forces were involved in such an operation was in February 1975 against People's Front forces north-west of Salala, in the Mammarr region.

Throughout the 1970-75 period, however, air power was used to bomb the liberated areas and to disrupt the life of the fighters and the civilian inhabitants there. It formed part of a broader policy of long-range bombardment which had not till then been seen in British counter-insurgency operations, although it was familiar from US policy in Vietnam, and was later used by the Indonesians in Timor. Planes, ships and long-range artillery have all been used in this way, usually as a preliminary to an attack by ground troops. In October 1975, the Iranian Navy fired 1,500 shells into a six-mile stretch of territory between the coastal villages of Dhalqut and Rakhyut as a preliminary to occupation by Iranian and SAF forces. The purpose of this has been to eliminate guerrilla forces and to coerce the population into seeking shelter in government-held areas.

The third practice mentioned, communications barriers, is designed to prevent the Front from sending arms and food to its units further inside Dhofar. Mountain positions like Sarfeet, overlooking PFLO supply lines can impede guerrilla communications and can draw off guerrilla forces and ammunition that would otherwise have been used elsewhere; but despite the narrowness of the distance between Sarfeet and the sea (less than four miles) the guerrillas were until late 1975 able to move their supplies through on camels and donkeys. Their lines to central Dhofar were only stopped by the creation of the Hornbeam and Demavand lines which had Unattended Ground Sensors at specific points and platoons of troops at regular intervals. From then on guerrilla supplies had to be carried through by human beings. These barriers also represent a development in British counter-insurgency practice; although the French had built a line over 300 miles long between Tunisia and Algeria during the Algerian war, and Unattended Sensors had been developed (without much success) by the US forces in Indo-China, the British have not used this tactic effectively in the past; for reasons that are unclear they have not yet tried to erect such a barrier along the 270 mile frontier between Ulster and the Irish republic.

At the organisational and political levels of the Dhofar counter-insurgency, the legacy of the previous periods is clear. As elsewhere the SAS play a special and concealed role. They participated in the October-November 1971 campaign in Eastern Dhofar, the only time it is certain that British infantry were used in front line engagements, and after that they have formed

a British Army Training Team which trains Dhofari irregulars, the *firqas*, and fights with these irregulars in mountain operations. They also work with them in pacifying reconquered localities. Little is known about their combat role and the British government denies that the SAS participate in offensive actions, admitting only that they *"seek out realistic training situations"* and *"if fired upon, they will fire back"*. Another familiar presence in British counter-insurgency operations are the Gurkhas: these mercenaries from the Nepalese Himalaya have also been in Dhofar, and in 1974 some were decorated for bravery as a result.

The Dhofari *firqas* are counter-guerrilla units modelled on the *"counter-gangs"* of Kenya: as in Kenya they are recruited from deserters from the guerrilla forces. There are estimated to be about 1,500 Dhofaris organised in this way, most of them tribesmen who have deserted from the Front since 1970. The *firqas* play a more important role, however, than the *"counter-gangs"* of Kenya, since the latter were mainly restricted to intelligence-gathering, while the *firqas* have been used for raiding the liberated areas, and, most ominously, for holding down reconquered territories. It is this latter policy that presents the greatest threat for the future of Dhofar and which is reversing the Front's attempts to eliminate tribal differences in the mountains.

Before the beginnings of the revolutionary movement the basis of inter-tribal feuding was conflict over water wells; one of the first steps taken by the Front in its attempt to eliminate tribalism was to declare all water the common property of the people, and not the property of a specific tribe. What is now happenning in the Dhofari mountains is that specific *firqas*, each of which is organised on a tribal basis, are reclaiming control of water sources and restricting the access of other tribes. The comment of one pro-British writer is clear on this: *"It is the government's policy in siting water wells to encourage a tribal intermingling. The existence of the firqas directly contradicts that policy. Well armed and regularly paid, some of them are in a position to run a highly efficient protection racket based on access to water"*[18].

Population control and food control are also integral parts of the counter-insurgency campaign in Dhofar. The paradigm for this is the Malayan campaign where in 1951-1953 over ½ million Malayan Chinese were resettled in around 600 new villages in order to break their contact with the guerrilla movement. In Kenya, over 1 million people were forcibly resettled during the counter-insurgency campaign (see also note 16). These tactics have a double function: to deprive the guerrillas of supplies and support and to coerce the civilian population into accepting government control. While the resettlement policy has been less widespread than in Malaya, nine centres have been established in the mountains in order to enable the government to carry this policy through. After the simple food control measures of the late 1960s (enforced around Salala), this new policy was developed with on the one hand the construction of settlements run by *firqas* and on the other, a systematic attack on those areas outside government control designed to push the population into these centres and into government-held areas. Wells have been attacked, fields burnt, camels, cattle and goats strafed from the air. The population who remain outside government control have therefore been subjected not only to bombardment, but also to the danger of starvation: by 1973 malnutrition and diseases resulting from it such as

trachoma had increased in the liberated areas. The largest regrouping centre of all was in the environs of Salala: those who did not stay in the mountain resettlement centres were housed in new cheap units built on the Salala plain, where they were given a salary and kept under careful surveillance. In writing of Malaya, Sir Robert Thompson, head of the British Advisory Mission in Vietnam from 1961 to 1965, has written: *"The fundamental aim behind the establishment of the security framework based on strategic hamlets is to isolate the insurgent both physically and politically from the population."*[19] This describes well the population control measures used in Dhofar. Control has even gone to the extent of branding the cattle of the mountain people so that a check can be kept on whether they are being moved about or used by the People's Front guerrillas.

Integral to this attack on the population is the psychological warfare campaign being conducted by the government. Leaflet drops, radio, loudspeaker broadcasts from government positions, and, since 1974, colour TV have all been used to reach the fighters and the population in the liberated areas or, in the case of TV, to reinforce government control of those in the reconquered zone. One of the main purposes of the campaign is, as in Malaya, to encourage members of the guerrilla forces to surrender, and this is done by a mixture of carrot and stick methods.

The most obvious carrot is money: the equivalent of £50 is offerred for information on arms caches. Security from Bombardment is another inducement. The regime has also gone so far as to criticise the People's Front for emancipating women and limiting to one the number of wives a man can have; those men who cross over to the government side are allowed to have four again, as is traditional in Muslim societies. The stick side of the surrender campaign is terror: a leaflet dropped over western Dhofar in 1973, for example, proclaimed that *"Military planes, cannons and automatic weapons are out hunting for you. Wherever you have crept, they will teach you a lesson and in the end will kill you all"*. Those who run such psychological war campaigns are well aware that leaflets of this kind are most effective *after* a preliminaru softening up process, after, for example, guerrilla food supplies have begun to run short and the guerrilla area has been subjected to systematic bombardment.

British writers discussing Malaya have in particular stressed the use of guerrillas who cross over to the government side, what in counter-insurgency jargon are called SEPs (Surrendered Enemy Personnel). In Malaya, SEPs were used for intelligence, for propaganda films and for undercover operations; in Dhofar, many of those who crossed over did so in 1970, so their information became outdated, but the individual desertions that have continued provide the government with a basis for one leaflet campaign: sheets of paper with the picture and details of an SEP are dropped over the liberated areas, and the text relates how so-and-so was duped by the communists, then, revolted by their practices and decided to rally to the cause of Islam and loyalty to Sultan Qabus. Such leaflets may have little effect on politically formed cadres, but they do strike home at the less politically-conscious members of the guerrilla force, and PFLO has lost a lot of fighters through desertion. Whereas in

the early days (1970-72) many of the leaflets failed because they were apparently written in bad Arabic by British intelligence officers, they have had more effect since Jordanian intelligence personnel were brought in to provide technical assistance in the campaign.

Parallel to this campaign, the government has tried to split the population from the guerrilla force. Large rewards have been offerred for the half dozen men considered by the British as being the most important members of the Front: I remember well the amazement on the face of one man who had just deserted to the guerrillas from the Sultan's Army, and found he was eating next to the notorious Said Dublan for whose head he had been offered several thousand pounds only a week beforehand. Another tactic is indicated by the notebook of a British officer, Captain MRA Campbell, who was killed by the Front in 1971: this contained details of how the Sultan's Army were laying mines with Russian markings near waterholes used by the civilian population in an attempt to discredit the guerrillas. But the main appeal of the Sultan is based on the three factors listed by Sir Robert Thompson in his study of Malaya - nationalism, religion and material wellbeing.

Despite the evident reliance of the Sultan on numerous foreign powers, an attempt is being made to rally some sense of Arab Nationalism behind the regime. One of the *firqas* is known as the *Gamal Abd-al Nasser firqat*: official statements by the regime rather preposterously compare 23 July 1952 when the Nationalist military coup took place in Egypt, to 23 July 1970 when Qabus replaced his father. In 1975, Muscat radio, run by Egyptian personnel, took to broadcasting Nasserist songs from the 1950s.

More plausible are religion and material wellbeing. Despite the fact that the Front has never criticised religion, the very fact that the guerrillas do not invoke Islam and attacked some of the institutions associated with Islam (e.g. polygamy), has enabled the Sultan to invoke Islam against the Front. In Dhofar the government has brought in two dozen religious instructors from the al-Azhar mosque in Cairo, and has made a point of repainting the mosque in villages it took over. How far this policy has served a purpose is hard to tell, and probably the greatest impact has been in Northern Oman, where religious feeling is stronger than in Dhofar.

As for material wellbeing, since 1970 the Sultan has opened schools, clinics and veterinary centres in Dhofar, while government propaganda has tried to portray the guerrillas as an essentially destructive force: government spokesmen allege, for example, that the guerrillas have carried out no reforms in the mountain regions they controlled. The truth is that the *material* changes brought about by the government have been greater, while the *social and ideological* framework of Dhofari society (tribalist, authoritarian, religious) has remained the same in government-controlled areas.

The PFLO has carried out fundamental social and ideological changes in the areas it has liberated: in particular, it has campaigned against the ideas and institutions that had sustained tribal conflict and the oppression of women. The Sultan has done nothing to alter these and has indeed reinforced them. But the Front's capacity for social change has been limited by the meagre material resources at its disposal and by the increasingly destructive impact of the government's attack on the liberated areas. It has not been able to build many schools or hospitals or roads, as the government

could, and the changes in social relations have been less visible amongst a population whose immediate concern has been survival in the face of air and artillery bombardment.

THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

These weaknesses on the ground have been complemented by the extremely weak position of the PFLO on the external political front, outside Oman, in the rest of the Arab world, in Britain, in Europe and North America. There has been no major diplomatic opposition to the British role in Oman. No other imperialist power has opposed the British role, nor has any major Arab power, nor, after 1971, has the People's Republic of China. What a contrast this is with the situation during the first Oman War, when the conservative and tribal forces of the Imam received the noisy support of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China and even the USA which at that time was challenging Britain's position in the region.

The only power that gives full support to the PFLO is South Yemen, an impoverished and beleaguered state that has paid a high price for its solidarity. The Soviet Union has also provided support since 1971. But most of the Arab world has been disinterested. Libya gives financial aid and Qaddafi once threatened to send Libyan troops to Oman if the Iranians would not withdraw. Iraq provided some material and propaganda support on an intermittent basis up to 1975; but after the March 1975 agreement between Iraq and Iran, the Ba'thist government in Baghdad tempered its official support; later in the year it exchanged diplomatic relations with Sultan Qabus, while still publicising PFLO activities. Syria has never lifted a finger to aid PFLO and is even less likely to do so now that it has built its alliance with King Hussein of Jordan. Egypt, the former champion of Arab nationalism, expelled the PFLO office from Cairo in 1972 and in February 1976, Sadat paid an official visit to Muscat. In any case, Egypt has been a close collaborator of Saudi Arabia's since 1967. For its part, Algeria has recognised Qabus but allowed a small PFLO office to open in Algiers, and after the dispute over WEstern Sahara broke out in 1975, the Algerian media devoted some attention to the struggle in Oman. The whole Arab world proclaims its support at least in words for the struggle of the people of Palestine. But in the second Palestine, in Oman, the nationalists and "revolutionaries" have not been so willing to defend their principles. The Front has therefore been prevented from mobilising the kind of international support enjoyed by the Algerians, the Palestinians and the Vietnamese.

The Front have been further isolated by the kind of media control operated by the British. In this domain the assumptions and techniques of previous British campaigns have been deployed and have helped to prevent any serious protests from being made. During the counter-insurgency operation in the Radfan mountains of South Yemen (1963-64) the British government encountered some domestic opposition after press reports of a 'food control' campaign in which 50,000 South Yemenis had been driven out of their villages and had had their crops burnt. The High Commissioner at the time

later commented that *"it was the publicity which did the damage"*[20]; in Dhofar no such mistake has been made.

The British have enjoyed four advantages in controlling the news about Oman. First of all, the level of British military involvement has been numerically low even though the British force has formed the backbone of the whole counter-insurgency operation: in 1975, there were about 1,500 military personnel (all volunteers) in Oman, of which less than a third were near the front line. Hence British casualties have been minimal - at most 10 or 20 a year. The kinds of domestic concern caused in France, Portugal or the USA over their colonial wars, has not been a danger. The scale of the war, plus the fact that front line actions are performed by Baluchi, Jordanian and Iranian troops (countries where, as has been said, no protests would be heard), has enabled Britain to direct the war without shouldering the political burden of having to send quantities of men into the field.

A second and related advantage is the fact that the war has cost Britain relatively little: the Sultan has paid for the wages of the seconded British personnel (i.e. the money has been deducted from Omani oil revenues) and the traditional argument against colonial entangelements on economic ground has been hard to sustain. This is all the more so since British participation in the war has had an obvious politico-economic payoff - viz. the goodwill of the rulers of the Gulf, and in particular of Saudi Arabia and Iran, whose financial backing is so essential for the ailing British pound and for the British economy as a whole.

The most important advantage enjoyed by Britain in this respect is the simple fact that so little has been heard about the Oman War, and most of what is heard is purveyed by journalists close to the official British position. Oman has no British settlers, no white missionaries, no independent or meddling observers who might be given credence in the rest of the world. No permanent correspondents covered the war. On the contrary, the press are only allowed in on supervised visits. Many of the events there have simply been hushed up: the role of British troops in the 1971 autumn offensive only became known through an official leak some months later; similarly, it was two months before the Shah admitted that he had sent counter-insurgency forces into Oman in December 1973. No journalist covered the war till 1970 but since then the policy of silence has given way to one of restriction and selected revelation.

A special information apparatus has executed this policy. In London, a public relations firm, Michael Rice and Co. handled the Sultan's account, and in 1975 the Foreign Office seconded a significant official, a Mr. Tony Ashworth to the Ministry of Information in Muscat. Ashworth had previously worked in Aden and had been in charge of the Foreign Office's "China-watching" bureau in Hong Kong - the regional Information Office. His job probably included more than the mere distribution of government statements. The British government have been helped in this policy by the historically-generated disposition of British journalists to accept what they are told, not out of any dishonesty, but because they share the same ideological universe as their informants. The same tendency has been seen in Northern Ireland. Many journalists accepted, for example, that the British had not been behind the 1970 coup in Salala (*"Whitehall seemed genuinely short of information,,,"*) . None has questioned the tactics being used by the British to crush the resistance of the Dhofar population;

none has probed the corruption in the Sultan's administration - it was left to an American journalist, Jim Hoagland of the *Washington Post* to start reporting this in 1975.

The complementary historical factor is that the stories put about by the British journalists fell on fertile ground; the official press liaison people put out those myths that are most likely to be accepted. Reports in 1970-71 made great play of alleged guerrilla brutalities, while in the same period it was on several occasions falsely claimed that Chinese officers had been seen fighting with the Front. Some non-British journalists, less prone to collude have not been so welcome in Oman and have been treated less cordially; the French journalists Simonne and Jean Lacouture tell in their book of what happened when they visited Salala in late 1974. Whilst three British journalists were taken off on a helicopter by the RAF to visit government positions in the mountains (it crashed on take-off), the Lacoutures were greeted by an Omani official who offered to show them the province's development projects. When they asked about the war, he told them to enquire in Muscat, 500 miles away[21].

At times a remarkable screening process seems to operate in official publications. For example, an official British list of places where psychological torture has been practised (issued in 1972) names most incidents by country, but it then resorts to the phrase *"Persian Gulf 1970-71"* to disguise the country where this actually occurred, when there can be no doubt it was Oman[22]. Another case is to be found in Frank Kitson's *Low Intensity operations* (1971) the most famous of all recent British counter-insurgency books and the one which provoked significant interest in Britain because it was held to be discussing the possibilities of a military takeover in the UK itself. In his discussion of psychological warfare Kitson discusses the deployment of "PSYOPS 'staff'" (PSYOPS = psychological operations) in training establishments within Britain, and then goes on: *"So far as service manned teams are concerned, there is only one in existence which consists of an officer and eleven men. This is operating at the moment and is subsidized by the government of the territory in which it is deployed"* (p.188). There can be little doubt about which country Kitson is referring to, nor why its name was withheld.

CONCLUSION

Oman has been, in the words of one British officer *"the last place in the world where an Englishman is still called sahib"*, an almost anachronistic part of a long tradition of British colonial wars. But it has also served as an indication of the continued relevance of much of this experience, and of how this kind of campaign can be combined with new forms of counter-insurgency (helicopters, electronic sensors), and with an internationalisation characteristic of the post-colonial world. In their attempt to win their freedom, the people of Oman have brought down on their heads an astounding force of repression.

Summarising the balance of forces, it is evident that:

1. *Militarily,* the Front have been fighting in a very restricted environment, with forces that have been far too weak in numbers and firepower, against an enemy that has an overwhelming superiority in every respect.

2. *Politically,* PFLO has some advantages in Dhofar, but these have been more than offset by the character of some of its support there, and by its inability to open a second front in Northern Oman.

3. *Strategically,* PFLO has been almost without allies, facing an unprecedented coalition of determined and strong enemies, and has been precluded for a number of reasons from mobilising strong international support.

Despite the present situation, there is no reason to assume that the present counter-revolutionary regime in Oman will survive, and indeed there are several factors suggesting the opposite. The country is ruled by an autocratic Sultan who is kept in power by thousands of foreign troops occupying Omani territory. These forces have been able to contain popular opposition for the time being but the military and economic oppression of the country is certain to produce continued nationalist hostility to the regime and may do so even inside the army.

Secondly, Oman is not a rich country, and despite claims by the Muscat authorities to the contrary, Oman's oil output will start falling in 1977 from its present peak. It may dry up around 1990. The resulting drop in government revenue will produce problems for the Sultan, and he has already been forced to cut development spending and to borrow from Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Furthermore, new problems are being created. The economic changes brought about since 1970 have been based mainly on disproportionate investment in the coastal region around Muscat: the interior of the country has been neglected, and much of the employment provided has been short-term, in the construction industry. The large shanty-towns growing around Muscat and the depopulation of the North Omani interior are indices of this process.

In Dhofar, the British are now concerned at the difficulties arising in the reconquered territories as a result of the chaotic practices of their proteges, the *firqas*.

PFLO has certainly suffered severe military blows, but it has stated its determination to continue its struggle by all means at its disposal until its aims are met. Meanwhile, the underlying reasons for popular opposition to the Muscat regime certainly remain and are, in some ways, increasing.

FOOTNOTES

1. An earlier draft of this paper was prepared for inclusion in a reader on the Gulf projected by the Transnational Institute, Amsterdam.

2. There is no oil-production in Dhofar, and the Gulf's main fields are some hundreds of miles away. But had Dhofar, let alone the whole of Oman, fallen to the guerrillas, this would have threatened the political situation in the Gulf, as well as have opened the possibility of military conflicts involving producer states.

3. See, especially, on the military side, Michael Klare *"Gunboat Diplomacy"*, and Eqbal Ahmad and David Caploe *"The logic of military intervention"*, in Race and Class, London, Winter 1976.

4. The main regional members of CENTO were Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, with Britain and the USA playing a backup role.

5. Iran's Population is over 30 millions; Saudi Arabia's not more than 5 millions; Iran's armed forces total 250,000, Saudi Arabia's 50,000.

6. See *"Oil and Investment in Oman"*, the Gulf Committee, London 1974.

7. Another reason for Saudi non-intervention may have been the long-standing hostility between the two monarchies over control of the Buraimi oasis in Northern Oman. But this could not have stood in the way of a Saudi desire to assert its power *and* keep out the Iranians, had it been able to do so.

8. Six foreign countries participated in the 1900 expedition against Peking: Britain, France, Germany, Russia, USA, Japan. Japan, the newest but nearest state, provided the main contingent used its contribution to force concessions elsewhere from its senior partners (I am grateful to Walter Easey for this point).

9. The 15 other states were: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Columbia, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Luxemburg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Philippines, Thailand, Turkey, South Africa, and Britain. Most sent infantry battalions or brigades.

10. See Fred Halliday, *"Armed struggle in Ceylon"*, New Left Review 67.

11. The missiles were probably designed for use in a possible conflict with South Yemen, although Omani sources later claimed they had intended to use them against guerrillas who were holding out in caves.

12. See NACLA Report May-June 1975 *"Brazil, the continental strategy."*

13. On the Jungle Warfare School, see the Far Eastern Economic Review, 11 September 1971. Britain also contributed to the US effort in Vietnam by sending a military advisory team, headed by a Malaya veteran, Sir Robert Thompson.

14. SAS are the British equivalent of the US Green Berets. They have special equipment, receive training in relevant languages, and are highly secretive.

15. For a list of British operations, see Julian Paget, Counter-insurgency campaigning. Apart from overt campaigns, the British state has also engaged in a number of undercover subversive operations against hostile governments. Two known campaigns of this kind are the ones against the People's Republic of Albania in the late 1940s, and the provision of mercenaries and supplies to the royalist rebels in North Yemen after 1962.

16. Both the US strategic hamlets in Vietnam and the Portuguese *aldeamentos* in Mozambique, were modelled on the New Villages of the Malayan campaign. The Rhodesian policy of "Protected Villages" along the Mozambique border is also similar. Another means by which this technology and experience is diffused is via the training at British institutions of military personnel from ex-colonies. For example, the Sandhurst register of officers who 'passed out' in March 1973 included personnel from the following countries: Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Botswana, Brunei, Dubai, Gibraltar, Ghana, Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Thailand, United Arab Amirates, Uganda, Zaire. In written Answers to a Parliamentary Question, the British Minister of Defence state on 23 February 1976 that British personnel has been serving with 33 other armies in the previous five years, and that a total of 2,250 serving members of 66 foreign countries were at that time undergoing training in Britain. While not all of these were involved in counter-insurgency training, there can be no doubt that British experience in this domain is being widely diffused to selected personnel from many other armies.

17. See Philip Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947-1968 London, 1973, pp 130-33.

18. D.L. Price, Oman: Insurgency and Development, London, 1975 pp.11-12.

19. Robert Thompson, Defeating Communist Insurgency, London, 1966, p.123.

20. Kennedy Trevaskis, Shades of Amber, London, 1968, p. 208.

21. Les Emirats Mirages, Paris 1975, pp 96-97.

22. Report of the Committee of Privy Counsellors Appointed to Consider Authorized Procedures for the Interrogation of Persons Suspected of Terrorism, Cmnd. 4901, March 1972, p. 3.

FURTHER READING

Fred Halliday, Arabia without Sultans, London, 1974. Discusses the historical background and development of the revolutionary movements in North Yemen, South Yemen and Oman.

Julian Paget, Last Post: Aden 1964-67, London, 1969. The official military side of the campaign.

Joe Stork, "Socialist Revolution in Arabia" MERIP Report no. 15. An excellent first-hand account of South Yemen after independence, with extensive discussion of the revolutionary movement.

PFLO, Documents of the National Struggle in Oman and the Arabian Gulf, the Gulf Committee, 1974.

Women and the Revolution in Oman, the Gulf Committee, 1975. Includes discussion of changes in women's position within the liberated areas.

9th June Studies, The Oman War, 1957-59, the Gulf Committee, 1974.

Ranulph Fiennes, Where Soldiers Fear to Tread, London, 1975. Memoirs of a British mercenary who served in Dhofar. Revealing on pre-1970 British tactics, and on preparations for the 1970 coup. Also replete with "black propaganda" about PFLO.

AVAILABLE FROM THE GULF COMMITTEE

- General background broadsheet on Oman,, 5p.

- Oman: a class analysis, 25p.

- Documents of the National Struggle in Oman and the Arabian Gulf, £1.20p.

- Political Prisoners in the Oil States: Bahrain, Iran, Oman, Saudi Arabia, 30p.

- The Arms buildup in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf, 10p.

- Women and the Revolution in Oman, 30p.

- Iran Committee: Land reform and its direct effects in Iran, 75p.

- Iran Committee: Armed struggle in Iran

- Gulf Newsletter, 10 times a year, subscription £1.50 UK, £2.00 abroad.

- Fred Halliday, Arabia without Sultans, Pelican, £1.50p

Please add 15p for postage and packing per item. Advance payment for all publications please. Cheques to be written to the Gulf Committee.

middle east
research &
information
project

MERIP
REPORTS

MERIP REPORTS is a monthly bulletin of research and information about the political economy of the Middle East and the role of the United States in the area.

Recent issues include:

Lebanon Explodes

Development in the Middle East

Arabs in Israel

Land Reform and Agribusiness in Iran

Subscriptions are available at:

Individuals:	$ 7.50
Non-profit institutions:	$15.00
Other institutions:	$30.00

Add $2.50 for overseas surface mail and to Canada and Mexico.
Add $10.50 for airmail to N. Africa, Latin America and Europe
Add $13.00 for airmail to Asia, Africa, and Australia

Write to:

MERIP REPORTS
P.O. Box 3122
Columbia Heights Station
Washington, D.C. 20010

Printed and Published by THE GULF COMMITTEE, 6, Endsleigh street, London W.C.1